

Author's Notes on Dark Nature (contains major spoilers- please read the book first!!)

The story of **Dark Nature** was always part of the *Heart of the World* series from when I was writing the storylines for several books at the same time I was penning the first one, Elemental, back in the 2000s. It is a pivotal story in the adventure and though some aspects have been altered as I developed the novels in between, this story has a lot of links to that opening book. The name changed too; it was originally called Hard Rain, then Season of the Wild before settling on **Dark Nature**.

Sometimes a detail of a book will irritate an author till you get it right. At first the place where Robert / Marcus was developing the clouds was an old windmill! I know, it's hard to believe I ever thought that made sense except I had an idea about the sails blowing the clouds about. This changed to a weather station located on the side of a mountain. I've no idea what a weather station looks like but the one I envisaged was rather expensive and I wondered why it would even be there! Plus there was too much to and fro from the station to inside the mountain. Eventually I realised- why not just have some sort of base inside the mountain? I had been trying to avoid too many caves but in the end it made sense.

This is the first of the novels to bring back characters other than the regular ones. I say `bring back` - though Marcus wasn't actually in that first novel he was an ever present absence. His apparent death was the cause of much of the action. Writing it I knew he wasn't really dead and, being my first novel, I was so tempted to include a hint that perhaps his demise wasn't as it seemed. Thankfully I resisted!

Malvane was such fun to write that almost at the last minute I decided he would survive at the end of **The Spectres of Winter** even though at that point I didn't know the context in which he'd return. I started working on this book trying to imagine some creature lurking inside Devil's Peak and how they came to exist it suddenly made sense to use Malvane here and it's fitted even better than I imagined it would.

Part of the fun of these books is coming up with pretend explanations for things in the natural world. In **Blue Sky Black** I `revealed` that birds can communicate telepathically. Well how else do they fly in those wonderful shapes? This time you `discover` that some clouds are piloted by crystal beings.

The last few chapters of this book were hard to write because I've come to love these characters to the point where I instinctively know their feelings. Yet at the start of this project I always intended that Tom would be a different sort of children's book hero; a normal kid with a happy life rather than starting off at a disadvantages and then gradually take that away, partly because of his own actions. Reversing if you like the usual kids story where our hero is poor, lives in a shoe and so on but grows into a hero because it's his or her destiny. What I find more interesting is a kid who accidentally ends up with powers he thinks he controls but which lead him to over confidence and a mighty fall.

It's not really a spoiler if I tell you this is not the end of Tom Allenby's story but it is a story that now has a tragic twist and he has to move on, somehow.